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SUBJECT: KADIMA'S FIRST PRIMARY A MODEST SUCCESS FOR LIVNI

SUMMARY

¶1. (SBU) Foreign Minister and leader of the governing Kadima party, Tzipi Livni appeared visibly relieved if not positively jubilant over the outcome of her party's first-ever primary late Wednesday. Her loyalists, Tzachi Hanegbi and Roni Bar-On, earned the fourth and fifth seats despite the fact that they both face ongoing legal proceedings in connection with criminal investigations. Livni's personal success in securing the return of her supporters to office in the next Knesset is further enhanced by the blow dealt to her chief rival, Shaul Mofaz. While Livni reserved the number two slot for him, her generosity ended there. Her camp worked strenuously to ensure that his supporters did not secure high placings in the Kadima list. Though three Mofaz proteges took slots among the first twenty seats, many others were placed so far down the list as to call their political futures and the power-base of Mofaz himself into question.

LIVNI ALLIES PLACE HIGH,
DESPITE CORRUPTION ALLEGATIONS

¶2. (SBU) In comments to the press, Livni appeared pleased with the smooth primary process and results, declaring that Kadima now has "a winning team ... that symbolizes the center ... and will go together with me to elections and will lead this country." Livni could take initial satisfaction in having reshaped Kadima as her own party. Her strongest supporters, Knesset Member Tzachi Hanegbi and Finance Minister Roni Bar-On, came in at numbers four and five respectively. Their success defied media speculation that the indictment filed two years ago against Hanegbi (in regard to alleged inappropriate political appointments) and the new criminal investigation of Bar-On (in connection with a double voting allegation in the Knesset three years ago), might wreck their chances. Their success in the primary leaves Livni open to criticism that she is cultivating a corruption-free image while surrounding herself with allies of questionable character.

ITZIK: ENERGIZER-IN-CHIEF

¶3. (SBU) Outgoing Knesset Speaker Dalia Itzik, who scored a personal triumph by taking the number three slot after Mofaz, was the first Kadima "insider" to make the comparison with Likud, which she said "could only envy the broad-based composition of the Kadima list." She also noted the fact that there are four women in the first ten slots. Itzik, whom one commentator has already marked as aspiring to the foreign affairs portfolio in a future coalition, is an effective spokesperson and is already working to secure some much-needed energy for the party which Ehud Barak has variously described as "a refugee camp for politicians" and "a supermarket of political ideas."

KEEP THE OPPOSITION CLOSE, THEN DESTROY THEM

14. (SBU) Livni had been criticized for her questionable political skills, but she appears to have outmaneuvered her chief rival, Shaul Mofaz, who saw some of his proteges end up so low on the party list that even the most optimistic forecast of Kadima's performance on February 10 would not put them in parliament. Livni's offer of the party's number two slot to Mofaz immediately after she defeated him in the race for party chairman kept Mofaz in prominent view, but did not prevent Livni's supporters from demolishing his "camp." These tactics led to a Kadima list in which Mofaz allies Ze'ev Boim and Ruchama Avraham came in at only six and eight respectively, followed by Ronit Tirosh at 16 and Shai Hermesh at 24. The greatest upset in the Mofaz camp was the defeat of settler MK Otniel Schneller who came in at number 27 on the list, to the surprise of Israeli pundits. If this was not sufficient bad news for one night, Mofaz saw his Druze candidate, Akram Hasson, beaten out of the reserved minorities' slot, which was taken by Livni's Druze candidate, Deputy Foreign Minister Majali Wahabe.

COMMENT: STRIVING FOR DYNAMISM,
ACHIEVING THE ORDINARY

15. (SBU) Livni is working to portray Kadima as a dynamic centrist party that will represent the majority of Israelis on February 10, but the party list offers nothing new to a weary electorate still searching for that magic "yes we can" equivalent. The biggest benefit the list provides Kadima is a comfortable, experienced, and relatively cohesive nucleus that can guide the party during the electoral season. Livni, however, should not discount some possible defections on the part of the disaffected (David Tal and

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SUMMARY

Schneller come to mind).
CUNNINGHAM